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Toothpaste

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Toothpaste

"You can't put toothpaste back into the tube" is a metaphor illustrating the impossibility of undoing some actions that we might not have wanted to happen. With proper reflection upon certain of our past experiences, we might find that we become pleased rather than disappointed.

We each have had moments of insight and inspiration that could be described as "spiritual," some of which we might have ignored or even denied. Whether or not we forgot or repressed the memory of such events, we were affected; something happened, and we are not the same. We can keep experiences of spirit in the basement of our consciousness, but they remain, as surely as the toothpaste that is out of the tube. Sometimes we consciously and freely open the door of our memories, at other times, a particular event comes to mind as a surprise. Past spiritual encounters are treasures that are to be utilized, not stored and ignored.

Though our spirituality is always lived in the present, we can choose to bring to mind and re-evaluate some of our past experiences. We are not interested in nostalgia, as for an old teddy bear; we want to find for today something that perhaps we were not ready to incorporate into our lives at an earlier time. For those who are willing to recall some past events with the wisdom they have in the present, it can be like opening a box of photographs that suddenly enables us to see our life story fitting together in a way that it previously had not. God is in all the discoveries we make when we review events of earlier years that we had once chosen not to investigate or to admit into consciousness.

God has reached out to us all through our lives, sometimes in dramatic events, sometimes in quiet, interior revelations. We might have recognized and accepted some actions or illuminations as personal gifts of love, others we might have dismissed as irrelevant or not in keeping with our mindset, and still others we might have pushed into our unconscious because of the painful circumstances in which God approached us. If we sense that now we are ready to open ourselves to accept some gifts that were offered previously, we can let the past become a blessing for our lives as we now live them. Our motivation for looking back is to integrate some riches that have always belonged to us, not to engage in guilt or regret.

The tools for helpful remembering are: some quiet time, some honesty, and some prayer for guidance. On a basis of "one at a time," we can allow into our active consciousness the memory of an experience with its accompanying feelings instead of keeping it as only a mental image. We can consider the particular meaning for us of a thought that once touched us, rather than generalizing about it. We can "look and listen" with our interior senses rather than rationalize away an event that had affected us.

If we choose to exercise active remembering in company with God, we can expect to recognize, perhaps with a bit of embarrassment, that what we had formerly dismissed as not belonging to us is now seen as uniquely and beneficially our own. For some, the activity of searching the past for evidence of God's particular and personal revelations becomes a "healing of memories." For others, as they recover some graces, insights, and understandings that they had barely noticed before, they find consolation and a deeper sense of their purpose in life.

When is the right time to look back at the past in order to enhance the present? Each of us will recognize that time by our interest and our desire. Could that be now? Is the toothpaste out of the tube?